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RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001131

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SUBJECT: SOMALI AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES DETAINED FOREIGN
FIGHTERS IN ETHIOPIA

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 1079 (NOTAL)

¶ B. ADDIS ABABA 1105

¶ 1. (U) SUMMARY. In an April 11 press conference in Addis Ababa, Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) Ambassador to Ethiopia Abdi Karin Farah acknowledged that 41 suspected foreign terrorists had been captured in Somalia and were in Ethiopian custody, and that another 200 were being detained in Somalia. Stressing Somali responsibility and Ethiopian assistance in processing the detained suspects, Farah refuted allegations that suspects were routinely subjected to torture and human rights abuses. Characterizing the detention methods as "procedural" and "transparent," Farah asserted that suspects had been subjected to "little more than questioning." The TFG's lack of embassies, consulates, and high-security prisons required that suspects be transferred to Ethiopian custody, he explained. Farah asserted that Mogadishu was experiencing its most peace period in 16 years: foreign fighters supporting the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) were responsible for violent attacks in Mogadishu, including "terrorist war crimes" targeting NGOs and schools. END SUMMARY.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR INSECURITY IN MOGADISHU

¶ 2. (U) Amb. Farah attributed violence in Mogadishu to foreign fighters supporting the ousted CIC. He said that Mujahideen had publicly claimed responsibility on April 10 for recent attacks in Mogadishu that caused over 100 deaths. Farah insisted that extremists, particularly al-Shabaab elements of the CIC, were collectively responsible for more than 300 assassinations during the last 10 months. In recent weeks the CIC had been targeting intellectuals, women's and business associations, ex-militia, and TFG supporters. Referring to these ICU-led attacks as "terrorist war crimes," Farah said attacks included shooting down an aircraft supporting the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and firing open shells on schools and restaurants.

¶ 3. (U) Farah expressed regret that TFG and ENDF defense operations had likely resulted in some recent civilian mortalities, and offered the TFG's apologies. Farah asserted that Mogadishu was experiencing its most peace period in 16

years, with no reports of killings in Mogadishu from April 1-10.

TFG CONTINUES POLITICAL OUTREACH TO HAWIYE

14. (U) Farah highlighted that a significant number of extremists had been killed over the last several months, and that immediate threats to TFG and civilian security had been significantly reduced by the informal ceasefire of the last 10 days. On a parallel note, Farah reported that "diplomatic" normalcy was beginning to return to Somalia, as Hawiye elders were making significant progress towards re-establishing their authority, and had engaged last week in a series of meetings with TFG PM Ghedi. As the most problematic of the al-Shabaab leaders had been disavowed by his elders, the TFG had made recent inroads towards cross-clan dialogue. Farah said the April 16 reconciliation conference would likely be delayed a month, while organizing committees in Nairobi sought further funding for it, but that the conference was a tremendous tool for continued dialogue.

41 TERRORISM SUSPECTS DETAINED IN ETHIOPIA

15. (U) Farah acknowledged that 41 suspected terrorist fighters were being held in Ethiopia. Of the 41, 29 had been brought before a military court and would be released; the remaining 12 would be processed shortly by a military court. Stressing Somali responsibility and Ethiopian assistance in processing the detained suspects, Farah refuted allegations that suspects were routinely subjected to torture and human

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rights abuses. Amb. Farah said recent press reports alleging TFG and Ethiopian human rights abuses of detainees were "baseless, unfair, inaccurate, and willfully misleading". Characterizing the detention methods as "procedural" and "transparent," Farah asserted that suspects had been subjected to "little more than questioning." The TFG's lack of embassies, consulates, and high-security prisons required that suspects be transferred to Ethiopian custody, he explained.

ANOTHER 200 FOREIGNERS DETAINED IN SOMALIA

16. (U) Farah said that approximately 200 additional foreign detainees remained in Somalia. Citing security and diplomatic concerns, Farah declined to provide further details. Farah said that as of April 11, several detainees had asked not to be placed in contact with their respective embassies (i.e., rejected consular access), while an as yet unspecified number of the 200 awaited consular access.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Amb. Farah sought to underscore the joint nature of detainee operations, emphasizing cooperation between Ethiopian forces and TFG authorities. While seeking to highlight the "transparent" nature of the detentions, Farah disclosed few new details about the 41 detained foreign fighters in Ethiopia or the 200 additional fighters detained in Somalia. Farah did not discuss any individual cases or nationalities (e.g., detained Amcit Amir Mohamed Meshal) (ref B), nor did he suggest that any other Amcit was among those being detained. Separately, Ethiopia's foreign ministry announced April 9 that the GOE would try 12 detained foreign fighters in a military court as "suspected terrorists". GOE authorities were expected to conduct a hearing on April 13 on the status of foreign fighters detained in Ethiopia, but as of late April 13 had not publicly announced any decision.

END COMMENT.

YAMAMOTO